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Antecedents and Mediators of Employees' Counterproductive Work Behavior and Intentions to Quit

Aldea-Capotescu Roxana ^a *

^a *The Center of Advanced Organizational Studies, Eminescu 60, Deva, 330172, Romania*

Abstract

Considering the risk factors which can influence on healthy workplaces, the objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between stress (measured with OSI), counterproductive work behavior (measured with CWB Scale) and employees' intentions to quit. The participants were 139 Romanian public service workers (90 women and 49 men). The results showed that the connection between work stressors and the intention to quit is mediated by the organizational climate, and revealed the role of the recognition as a mediator factor for the relationship between work stressors and counterproductive behavior. The implications of these findings for future research and organizational practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The motivation for this research is determined by the fact that employees' involvement in counterproductive behaviors may have devastating effects on organizations. The costs of acts of fraud and theft of employees are estimated at over \$50 billion annually (Dineen, Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2006). Counterproductive behaviors can be expressed as interpersonally deviant behaviors such as harassment of, violence against, gossip about, or theft from a coworker (Avey et al., 2008), or organizationally deviant behaviors such as intentionally working at a slower rate, sabotaging company property or sharing confidential company information (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Avey et al., 2008). In this study, counterproductive behaviors at work are defined as voluntary acts that intend to harm or affect organizations or people in organizations (Spector & Fox, 2005). Currently, workplace interventions targeting counterproductive work behavior focus more on potentially illegal conduct, often with little attention to issues of civility (Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008). Past research suggests that such oversight can have important consequences, such as employee discontentment, job accidents, overuse of sick leave, work team conflict, productivity decline and turnover (Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008). Thus it is imperative that leaders establish codes of conduct, so that norms of respectful interaction prevail at all levels of the organization.

Corresponding author name: * Aldea-Capotescu Roxana. Tel.: +40-723-154-358

E-mail address: capotescu_roxana@yahoo.com

2. Investigation of counterproductive work behavior and intention to leave the organization within the theoretical models of occupational stress

In an attempt to identify variables related to occupational stress, several theoretical models have been proposed: We list below some of these models which have received empirical support: the *Demand - Control Model* (Theorell & Karasek, 1996), the *Effort - Reward Imbalance Model* (Siegrist, 1996), the *Demand - Skills - Support Model* (van Veldhoven, Taris, de Jong, & Broersen, 2005). Most of these models include a number of resources or situational factors that contribute to how people interpret situations and cope with the demands imposed. These factors combine in different ways to generate stress, leading to unwanted consequences such as burnout, illness, quitting the organization or engaging in counterproductive behavior.

Several studies have underlined the links between certain types of stress and counterproductive work behavior. Thus, Spector and Fox (2005) identified significant relations between organizational constraints/work conditions and counterproductive work behavior and Chen and Spector (1992) highlighted important liaisons between role ambiguity, role conflict, organizational constraints/work conditions, and interpersonal counterproductive behavior.

Intention to quit is defined as an employee's plan or intention to leave the present job and look forward to find another job in the near future (Masroor & Fakir, 2010). Although many researchers have tried to identify what determines an employee's intention to quit, to date there has been little consistency in the findings of the researchers (Glissmeyer, Bishop & Fass, 2007). Empirical studies have linked job satisfaction, performance and job stress to an individual's intent to quit the organization. Heavy workload (which is a precursor to job stress) and burnout (which have also been linked to low job satisfaction) are related to intention to quit (Masroor & Fakir, 2010).

Research carried out in Romania in occupational stress and the relationship between work stressors and global counterproductive work behavior focused at the theoretical level on proposing and testing models adapted to the Romanian cultural environment (Pitariu & al., 2004; Capotescu & Pitariu, 2007; Aldea-Capotescu, 2011)

Organizational Stress Indicator (OSI) developed by Cooper and Williams (1976) is based on a cognitive model of stress and is the most commonly used set of scales to achieve diagnostic work-related stress. Studies using OSI included many professional groups from different countries: police officers, public sector employees, managers, health care employees and business men and women. Previous research conducted with OSI in Romania (Capotescu & Pitariu, 2007) suggested that *recognition* (defined as the tension perceived in the way the organization recognizes and rewards the work of employees by providing opportunities for career advancement) and *organizational climate* (the extent in which the organization's structure is a source of stress for employees) may play a mediating role between job stress and intention to leave the employer, and counterproductive work behavior.

2.1. Objectives

The overall objective of the study is currently investigating the antecedents and mediators of employees' counterproductive work behavior and intentions to quit. The **specific objectives** are: (1) the investigation of the relationships between job stressors, organizational climate and intention to quit and (2) the investigation of the relationships between job stressors, recognition and counterproductive work behavior

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

In this study were involved 139 Romanian public service workers providing a range of customer services, 90 women and 49 men. The average age (M) is 33 years, with a standard deviation of 10.09. Age limits are 20 and 58 years. 84.2% of the employees have higher education. 22.3% of participants have managerial positions. In regard to tenure in the organization, 28.1% of participants have less than 6 months, 19.4% have between 6 months and 1 year, 17.3% among 1 year and 2 years, 4.3% between 2 to 3 years, 4.3% between 3 and 5 years and 26.6% have more than 5 years.

3.2. Procedure

The investigation was conducted on small groups, composed of two to five public service workers. The entire procedure of completing the questionnaires was conducted during the working hours. Therefore, in order not to interfere with the work activities, the participants were allowed to choose the time of testing. Anonymity and confidentiality of the data was emphasized.

3.3. Instruments

Organizational stress indicator-2 (OSI) developed by Cooper and Williams (1976) is derived from the first version of the OSI. The questionnaire consists of 90 items that assess the major sources of pressure/stress in the organization (stressors), the major consequences of occupational stress (stress reactions) and the control mechanisms of stress and individual variables that may moderate the impact of stress. For the present study we selected the scales that assess the stressors (work overload, relationships with others, work-family balance, role management, responsibilities and hassles) and the scales that assess recognition and organizational climate.

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) (Bennett & Robinson, 1995). The questionnaire includes 19 items measuring the counterproductive work behavior. The evaluation is done on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = every day). It measures the frequency of engagement in counterproductive work behavior: 7 items assess contraproductive behavior directed towards others and 12 items assess contraproductive behavior oriented towards the organization.

To measure the **intention to leave** among the public service workers I used a single question measure: "How often have you thought about leaving this organization in the last six months?" This item was rated on a five-point Likert type scales ranging from '1' "never" to '6' "very often."

4. Results

Based on the scientific literature on the relationship between job stressors and counterproductive work behavior on one hand (Chen & Spector, 1992; Penney & Spector, 2005) and the relationship between job stressors and intention to quit on the other hand (Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008), we specified and tested using structural equations models (1) a theory assuming that organizational climate mediates between work stressors and intention to quit and (2) a model postulating that recognition mediates between work stressors and counterproductive behavior.

The categories of organizational stressors included in the analysis were taken from the occupational stress model proposed by Cooper and Williams (1976): work overload, relationships with others, work-family balance, role management, responsibilities and hassles. Recognition and organizational climate were considered as mediating variables. Figures 1 and 2 presents the theoretical model tested.

To test our models, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses using the AMOS software package. The fit of the model to the data was examined with χ^2 fit index, the normed fit index (NFI), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). In general, models with fit indices $> .90$ and an RMSEA $< .05$ indicate an acceptable fit between the model and the data.

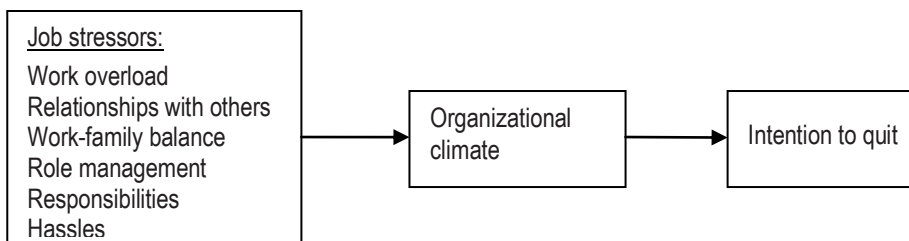


Figure 1. The mediating effect of organizational climate between work stressors and intention to quit

Table 1. Results of Structural Equation Modeling Analyses: Fit Indices for the Mediating effect of organizational climate

Model	χ^2	df	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 1: Mediating effect of organizational climate	$\chi^2 (6) = 7.758$, p=.025	6	.982	.996	.046

Table 1 shows the summary results. The results have revealed the fact that the connection between work stressors and the intention to quit is mediated by the organizational climate ($\chi^2 (6) = 7.758$, p=.025, NFI=.982, CFI=.996, RMSEA=.046).

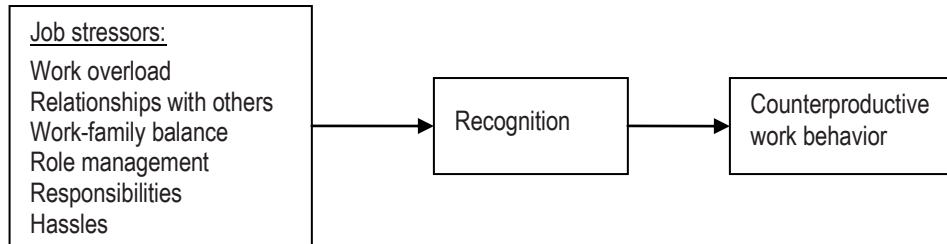


Figure 2: The mediating effect of recognition between work stressors and counterproductive work behavior

Table 2. Results of Structural Equation Modeling Analyses: Fit Indices for the Mediating effect of recognition

Model	χ^2	df	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 2: Mediating effects of recognition	$\chi^2 (6) = 17.146$, p=.048	6	.965	.975	.061

As can be seen in Table 2, the values obtained for all four indicators attest to a good fitness of the model. Based on the results we can say that recognition acts as mediator in the relationship between occupational stressors and employee counterproductive work behaviors.

To assess more specifically the organization oriented productive behaviors, we tested a model where we included organizational stressors as independent variables and recognition as the mediating variable.

Table 3. Results of Structural Equation Modeling Analyses: Fit Indices for the Mediating effect of recognition

Model	χ^2	df	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 3: Mediating effect of recognition	$\chi^2 (6) = 11.360$, p=.007	6	.997	.998	.007

The results presented in Table 3 are highlighting the role of recognition as a mediator variable between the perception of organizational stressors and employees' involvement in counterproductive behaviors oriented towards the organization.

5. Discussions and conclusions

In a context where an organization faces a major crisis, the source of stress is generally obvious. In most situations involving employee participation in counterproductive behavior and leaving the organization, the impact of stress is less obvious, requiring systematic diagnosis of stress sources and their impact on the organization.

Leaving the organization and employee's involvement in counterproductive behavior are two of the most relevant consequences of stress outlined at the organizational level. Assuming that the diagnosis of stress is not an activity that takes place only at a single point in time, but a permanent feature of the effective stress management, this study can be considered as the first step of a stress diagnosis as background for counterproductive behavior at work and intention to leave the organization.

The results have revealed the fact that the connection between work stressors and the intention to quit is mediated by the organizational climate. In case of employee involvement in counterproductive behaviors, the results showed the role of the recognition as a mediator factor in the relationship between work stressors and overall counterproductive behavior, but also between work stressors and one particular dimension of the counterproductive behavior, which is organizational oriented counterproductive behavior.

This research has some practical implications for organizations. Employers and managers need to recognize incivility and its negative effects inside the organization. Rather than regard counterproductive work behavior as a private problem for individuals to resolve, organizations should actively discourage it.

Our results suggest a number of managerial implications. First of all, as job stressors are significant determinants of both counterproductive work behavior and intention to quit (indirectly through organizational climate characteristics) and turnover intentions (through recognition), the management should undertake steps to increase satisfaction with recognition among their employees and to improve the organizational climate characteristics.

The empowerment autonomy seems to have a relatively strong impact in terms of stress reduction. One important implication is to give to the employees the possibility to influence working pace, method and sequence of tasks in dealing with customers (Ruyter, Wetzels & Feinberg, 2001). According to Ruyter, Wetzels & Feinberg (2001), developing empowerment autonomy could be done at three levels: (1) strategic (general work conditions such as working hours or shift systems), (2) process (process changes such as service quality improvement by reducing response times), and (3) operational participation (planning or determining standards).

Finally, several limitations of the study can be highlighted. Thus, the proposed models were tested in a single occupational category, which limits the possibility of generalization of the conclusions. It is important that future studies to implement the proposed methodology to investigate these issues in various professional categories, to provide a comprehensive picture of the relations between stressors, employees' intention to quit and the involvement in counterproductive behaviors at work. Also, the models tested in future studies could include a number of other factors, which, along with perceived organizational stressors influence the development of negative emotions and attitudes towards work.

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